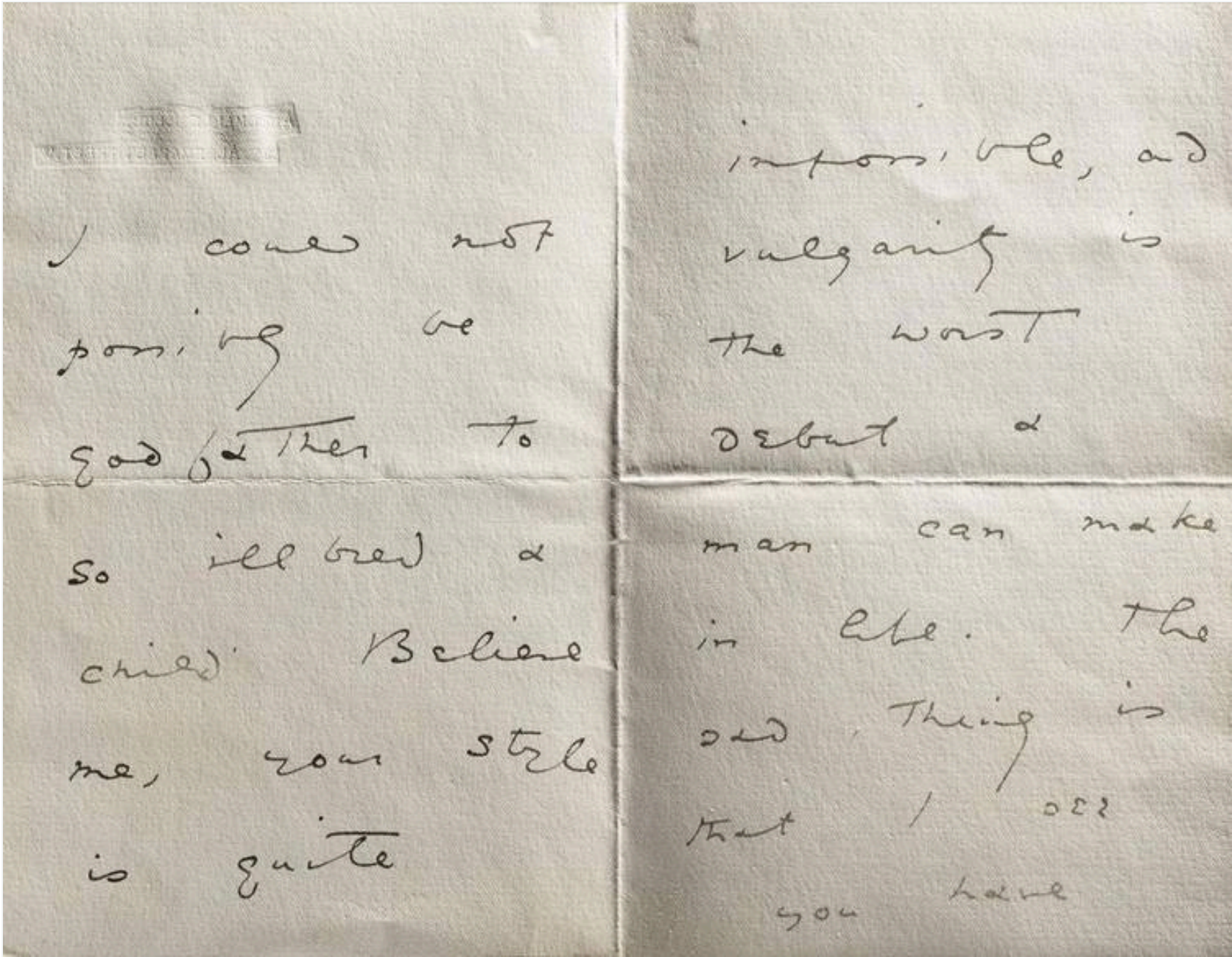


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William Nicoll Cresswell

Lot 37: *WILDE, OSCAR.*

Est: £10,000 GBP - £15,000 GBP

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Sotheby's

October 29, 2004

London, United Kingdom

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Item Overview



Description

Three autograph letters signed ("Oscar Wilde"), to Herbert Vivian, with Vivian's drafts of four replies to Wilde and a typescript of Vivian's article in "The Sun" on 17 November 1889

Condition Note:

a remarkably acrimonious correspondence, arising from Vivian's published account of Wilde based on hearsay and anecdote, 16 pages, 8vo, on headed stationery of the Albemarle Club from 16 Tite Street, Chelsea, three autograph envelopes, [22 November 1889 to 20 May 1890], Vivian's draft letters 12 pages, 8vo, 22 November 1889 to 21 May 1890, *some light soiling or spotting*

[*Wilde*]...I have just seen a copy of the Sun with your spot on it...your style is quite impossible, and vulgarity is the worst debut a man can make in life...

[*Vivian*]...I am sorry to learn that our views on Vulgarity are so conflicting...If you won't be Godfather to my *enfant terrible*, I hope you will consent to help in circumcising him...

[*Wilde*]..I was asserting my right to prevent my name being in any way associated with a book that...I must admit I consider extremely vulgar and offensive. No one has the right to make one godfather to a dirty baby against one's will...by doing so you make a very wilful surrender of that position you hold as a gentleman...I should be sorry to think that any Cambridge man could be wilfully guilty of such conduct, conduct which combines the inaccuracy of the eavesdropper with the method of the black mailer...you have no right to make any use of my name in connection with your book...

[*Vivian*]...Your outrageous letter has afforded me infinite amusement...I am amused that you should now whine about indiscretions, who yourself wrote me..."pray be indiscreet"...I shall publish precisely what I choose about you or any one else...

[*Wilde*]...I cannot possibly compete in abuse with you...you have given pain to a lady...my wife, by writing about our children...You really have no position to go on...

[*Vivian*]...If you think the matter is worth submitting to arbitration I...would suggest Mr Whistler...[etc.]

**Artist or Maker**

William Nicoll Cresswell

**Literature**

*Complete Letters*, pp.415, 426-7 (*et passim*, but without Vivian's side of the correspondence).

**Notes**

This bitter quarrel developed when the journalist Herbert Vivian (1865-1940) published in the *Sun*, on 17 November 1889, the first chapter of *The Reminiscences of a Short Life*, which reported private conversations, some relating to Wilde's family, and Whistler's accusing Wilde of "plagiarism"

...It was at this party that Whistler's famous 'mot' first saw the light. Whistler having got off some poignant epigram, Oscar called out gushingly, "Oh! Jimmy, I wish I had said that". "Never mind, Oscar, you may be sure you will", was the crushing retort...

This was as well as Vivian's printing a letter by Wilde without permission (Wilde had good-humouredly encouraged him on 26 June 1889, saying "be indiscreet", though declining to contribute, since "good reminiscences require no preface"). From Wilde's initial furious reaction, fiercely dismissing any possible association with the *Reminiscences* (which Vivian hoped to republish in book form with an introduction by Wilde), the quarrel only escalated. Vyvyan Holland would later record that the only person who ever refused to shake hands with him, when hearing that he was Wilde's son, was Herbert Vivian.

[Request more information](#)

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Auction Details

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